

M. P. SIVAGNANAM

ALIAS

MA. PO. SI.

THE ARCHITECTURE
OF
TAMIL NATIONALITY
IN INDIA

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TAMIL ARASU KANAGAM

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M. P. SIVAGNANAM: Ma.Po.Si.

The Architect of Tamil Nationality, India



Thiru M. P. Sivagnanam or Ma. Po. Si., as he is affectionately called by the 40 million strong Tamil-speaking peoples of Tamil Nadu, the southern-most State of the Indian Republic, is the founder-leader of an ancient, culturally evolved Tamil Nationality and inspirer and founder of a growing, dynamic and vital, nationality - based, socialist-oriented movement, called "*TAMIL ARASU KAZHAGAM*". With his characteristic moustache, he is an eminent leader of outstanding merit, who has made history in the political, linguistic, literary and cultural fields.

Early life of struggle

Like the seedling of the great oak, that is broadcast on the rough, rugged and rocky soil, he was born at Mylapore, (the south-end of Madras City) 64 years ago, (on June 26th 1906) in one of the poor, yet energetic families of toddy-tappers, popularly known as 'Gramanis'. Mylapore Ponnuswami Gramani, his father, though, feary-looking, had the golden heart of a good-natured worker. Proud, yet rustic in simplicity, he had contributed to the vein of granite hardihood in the constitutional make-up of Ma. Po. Si. His mother Sivakami Ammal comes from a highly evolved and culturally advanced, economically prosperous family, who could boast of a first graduate of their community, as her brother. She had a rudimental knowledge of English and well versed in

devotional songs of the Tamil poets Manickavasagar, Thayumanavar and Vallalar. She could herself compose *impromptu* Tamil songs and rhymes of cadence and pathos. Along with his mother's milk flowed the cultural manna in his mental, psychological and spiritual make-up, during the most impressionable and tender age.

Ma. Po. Si. in his boy-hood never had the opportunity to get a regular schooling. The pangs of poverty ate into the very vitals of his family and his father, engaged in the grim battle of life, had neither the wherewithal nor the aptitude to put his children to school. (He had 4 brothers and 6 sisters, of whom only one brother is alive today). However, with the tender care of his mother, he managed to go to school, upto the 3rd class. When a teacher in the school, took the beaming youngster to task, for not having equipped himself with necessary books and stationery, the proud father was enraged and put a total embargo on the educational activity of the young boy, probably, as a harbinger of the self-taught wisdom of the manly hero of our story.

Apprenticeship in Freedom Struggle

From the boyhood to the first stage of adolescence. Ma. Po. Si. was picking up desultory bits of knowledge by perusing old newspapers and books and by listening to the tales of wisdom and songs of joy, taught by his mother. During his boyhood, he was engaged as an apprentice to a Muslim (Labbai) Weaver's family and learnt the rudiments of weaving. When he had grown into manhood, the first stable

employment he ever had, was that of type-compositor in the National Tamil Daily called "*Tamil Nadu*" which was edited by the pioneer national leader Thiru P. Varadarajulu Naidu. It was, in fact, the same newspaper, which was an inspiring journal, spreading the message of Nationalism in Tamil Nadu in 1920s.

Ma. Po. Si., the budding politician and statesman, even while he was manipulating the compositor's stick learnt the bubbling currents and cross-currents of the mighty national upsurge, monitored by the Father of the Nation-Mahatma Gandhi. It was in the offices of "*Tamil Nadu*", Daily, amidst the composing stands and furniture, he was initiated into the mysteries of the Freedom Movement, which later on became his life-interest and dedication.

Even while he was working in "*Tamil Nadu*", the National newspaper, he was taking an active interest in Trade Union Movement, especially of press workers. Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, though an ardent Nationalist and first-rank freedom-fighter, was rather sceptical of the revolutionary enthusiasm of his worker and therefore Ma. Po. Si. had to walk out of "*Tamil Nadu*" News paper and swim in the endless and abysmal stream of unemployment.

In the mainstream of Freedom Movement

National Movement was gaining extraordinary momentum, and energising the life of the millions, particularly, the workers and pesants and Ma. Po. Si. was

caught in the vortex of the mainstream of nationalist consciousness. "Swaraj is my birth right" was the mighty slogan and the bugle call of the freedom fighter. Ma. Po. Si. jumped into the fry. Thereafter, his whole life was a series of episodes of awakening upsurge of freedom and that was in 1927.

He joined the Congress Movement and read with great devotion and avidity, the speeches and writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajaji and other leaders. He became familiar with the Satyagraha technique, which was masterminded by Mahatma Gandhi. "*Non-Violent Non Co-operation*" became the badge of his life and he participated in almost all the struggles sanctioned and ordained by the Indian National Congress. He was incarcerated in about half-a-dozen times, extended to over five years, in the aggregate. Hard-working and indefatigable organiser that he was, he built the Nationalist Movement in the City of Madras and participated in the several hierarchical positions in Tamil Nadu Congress.

Gospel of Prohibition and Life of Poverty

His political work was not done, amidst a life of leisure. It was performed like "*தவம்*" (Thavam or Penance) amidst the battle of life. He comes from a family of toddy-tappers, whose main hub of life revolved round the local beverage and alcohol, viz., toddy. (It is an essence, distilled from the coconut palm). But, it is the inviolable edict of a freedom-fighter in India to abide by the mandate of Prohibition, given unto the Congress by Mahatma Gandhi. How can Ma. Po. Si. deviate from the

puritanical maxim of Prohibition? But yet, how can he feed and support his big and growing family and be its main prop? It was, indeed a hard and agonising Hobson's choice. He was on the horns of a dilemma; between family duty and political morality. He did not waver for long and he made his choice in obedience to the Mahatma Gandhi's call of Prohibition. He left his family occupation and chose the life of a public worker of dedication and duty. As a result, Ma. Po. Si., the main bread-winner had to inflict on his family, a life of austerity and abject poverty.

The Last Phase of British Impreialism

Right in 1942, when the air was thick with the mighty suppression let loose by the vanishing British Empire, when Mahatma Gandhi gave the nation the clarion call of "*QUIT INDIA*", Ma. Po. Si. was again imprisoned and sent to Amroati Jail (in Central India), along with the famous leaders of Indian National Congress, like Thiru Prakasam Panthulu, silver-tongued Orator Thiru Sathiyamurthy and the Thiru K. Kamaraj. It was in the heart of burning crucible of Madhya Pradesh (where the Central Jail of Amroati was situated), when the gushes of hot wind blowing through the prison, alternated with the chill penuries of a languishing family, that his robust health was shattered and he became almost a physical wreck. He developed abdominal ulcers, which still continue to plague him. He was released in 1944 on medical grounds with a body, which had lost nearly 31 out of 119 pounds during the Jail sentence, with a badly shattered family and with a political atmosphere full of gloom and despair, bereft of the energising leadership,

which was vegetating behind the prison-bars.

The Vision of a New India

After his release from Amroati, he was like a rudderless ship on unchartered seas. The voice of reaction was confusing the minds of politically conscious people in India and elsewhere. Almost all the Nationalist leaders, were behind the prison bars. Ma. Po. Si. took a hard look at the reality. While he was at Amroati, he was undergoing a mental and ideological transformation. He acquired a new insight about the type of Society, that should be built up in the country. The grand design of the future, which was incubating in his mind came slowly to unfold itself. He tried to revive the political activities in his home State of Tamil Nadu. The hold of British imperialism was still very strong. He thought out a device of cultural programme to bolster up the message of Indian Nationalism. Taking advantage of his incarceration, he made a very deep and profound study of Tamil Literature and he wanted to give a new dimension to the cause of Indian Nationalism by cross fertilising it with the eternal message of Tamil classics and root it very deep in the sub-conscious layers of the Tamil people.

The birth of Tamil Arasu Kazhagam

Tamil Arasu Kazhagam, founded and fathered by him in association with a group of young and progressive intellectuals became the instrument to give concrete expression to the ideological strivings of Ma. Po. Si. This organisation started in 1946, had a three-fold objective :

1. சுதந்திரம் (Swaraj or Freedom)
2. சுய நிர்ணயம் (Self-determination)
3. சோஷலிசம் (Socialism)

Swaraj or Freedom

The last phase of British Empire was nearing its finale. The Pearl Harbour fiasco heralded the dropping of the curtain. Ma. Po. Si. realised that the emergence and the dawn of freedom was imminent. "Quit India" movement released the pre-mordial forces of Indian freedom from the sub-terranean region of Indian Society. Though the last phase, it was a very tough one and the struggle was extraordinarily Herculean. Ma. Po. Si. gave the first priority to the yet incomplete freedom struggle and inscribed the slogan "சுதந்திரம்" (Freedom) as the first in the banner of Tamil Arasu Kazhagam.

India - a Garland of Multi-coloured Nationalities

Poet Bharathi, the Keats of Tamil Nadu, had sung a chorus on the integration of India. He envisaged Mother India as wearing a garland strewn of multi-national flowers, like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra, Kannada, Punjab, Bengal etc., Language is the main determinant of a nationality (தேசிய இனம்). Language, cultural homogeneity, historical evolution, geographical alignment, economic environment and political consciousness are some of the factors, which go up to make the social concept of nationality. Fortunately for India, inspite of the so-called disintegrating factors, it is welded into a single National State, by the remarkable federal combination of stable and historically evolved nationalities from the time immemorial. A study of India history reveals a consistent

truth through out the ages and that is when, the Centre is loaded with concentrated powers, it becomes rigid at the Centre and anaemic at the extremities. Empires had floundered, when there was over-centerlisation at the Centre. A genuine Co-operative Federalism at the Centre, cemented by cordial relations of the Autonomous States has contributed to the strength of the Centre and stability of the States. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had clearly explained the true essence of Co-operative Federalism in Free-India. Ma. Po. Si. with his deep involvement in the cultural and literary roots of India, had with a clear and synoptic vision, envisaged the structure and the pattern of Free-India, as a mosaic built on the foundations of the fullest provincial autonomy, cemented and reinforced by a beneficent Centre, specializing in the All-India affairs like Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Communications. This is the essence of Ma. Po. Si.'s concept of சுய நிர்ணயம் (*Self-determination*), which is an harmonious blend of full state autonomy and a full-fledged Federal Centre, consistent with the lofty ideal of Indian unity, which is enshrined in the Constitution.

The Goal of Socialism

Ma. Po. Si.'s concept of Socialism is not a product of *declassé* indoctrination or academic polemics, but a process of his whole being, permeating every pore of his personality and written into his blood. Hailing as he does from a family, that has gone through the mill of grinding poverty, he has tasted to the full, the bitter cup of misery, which poverty inflicts. As he used to say:

"My Socialism is the blood of my blood.
It is written into the very vitals of my being.

I have learnt the quientessence of Socialism from the way in which my mother used to crush the juice of tamarind and prepare the soup from the rump of the tamarind, that is completely parched and ridden of its substance. I have learnt the unforgettable lesson that, unless the private property system, which grinds the millions into poverty, is changed root and branch and a new social order is built on the Socialist principles, there is no salvation for humanity".

The Tamil Arasu Kazhagam, led by Ma. Po. Si., is pledged to the ideal of building up a Socialist society. During its career of two decades, it has consistently supported every progressive measure, like the Inam Abolition, Bank Nationalisation, Lowering of Land Ceiling etc., It has also given its full fledged support to every struggle launched by the working class and the peasantry, like the Kisan agitation in Thanjavur, industrial strikes, strikes of civil employees. Ma. Po. Si. himself has been an active participant in the Trade Union Movement, under the inspiring leadership of Thiru. Vi. Ka. (Thiru V. Kaliyanasundaranar), Chakkarai Chettiar and Basudev.

Ma. Po. Si.'s Variegated Public Work

Ma. Po. Si. has had a distinguished career in both civic and legislative bodies. He had been the Alderman of the Madras City Corporation from 1948 to 1955. He had been the Chairman of the Education Committee of the Corporation in 1953 and the Chairman of Madras

District Local Library Authority in 1953-55 and again in 1970. In his capacity as Chairman, he had built up the institution, almost from a scratch and expanded its activities in a spectacular manner. He is now planning to make the Library Authority, a radiating centre of education and culture.

He had been a member of the Senate of the Madras University in 1953-54 and of the Madhurai University in 1968-69. During his tenure of membership of the Senate, for the first time, the Senate discussed and approved the principle of introducing Tamil Language as the medium of instruction in Colleges, which was a major policy break-through.

He was the President of Tamil Writers' Association in 1955-56 and also the President of several other literary organisations, like Bharathiar Sangam. He was awarded a shield by Tamil Writers' Association by the President of India, Thiru V. V. Giri.

Legislator

He was elected to the Madras Legislative Council in 1952-54. He took an active interest in passing the Thanjavur Tenants' Protection Act, during his membership and it was a great boon to the toiling peasants.

He was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly, as an one-man representative of Tamil Arasu Kazhagam from Thyagarayanagar Constituency of the Madras City in February 1967 and continues to be one of the prominent front-benchers of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. His persuasive eloquence, reinforced by his sincerity

and strong logic, brought several tangible legislative achievements to his credit. The renaming of Madras State into Tamil Nadu, for which he had pioneered a vast movement, had the winning approval of the late C. N. Annadurai, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and is a crowning glory of his legislative endeavour.

In Defence of Tamil Medium

In the midst of confusion prevailing over the language issue, Ma. Po. Si.'s clear-cut formula, has found a willing acceptance in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The Government of Tamil Nadu headed by Thiru C. N. Annadurai passed a historic resolution on 23—1—68, which put the entire linguistic policy on an enduring, scientific basis. *Inter-alia*, the resolution laid down that Tamil Language shall be the medium of instruction at all levels, primary, secondary, collegiate and post-graduate and this change-over shall be brought about within a period of five years from 23—1—68. It is one of the redoubtable cultural achievements of Tamil Nadu Assembly, to have placed Tamil Language on the pedestal of higher learning, as the sole medium of instruction and Ma. Po. Si. had the lion's share in bringing out this policy transformation.

The Struggle Against English Dominance

Almost unique and arrestingly peculiar is the phenomenon of the dominance of the English language in all walks of life of the Indian Nation, even though more than two decades have elapsed since the dawn of Independence. English is, still, the dominant language of culture, administration and business; it is, still, cherished by the *elite*, the well to-do, the educated, and, in fact, by the entire ruling class. It is the symbol of high status

and the passport to fashionable society. Even the ordinary folk are under the hypnotic spell of English. Though the standard of English language has fallen to miserably low levels, even the smattering of English confers upon the possessor some social distinction. The air is thick with the imitative pollution of psuedo-English.

The English-educated classes have not utilised their new-won knowledge for enrichening their own mother-tongues and for embellishing their own cultures. On the other hand, they have used their English knowledge as a ladder for social climbing and dominance. Most of the languages of India, though blessed with a long tradition and rich legacy of literature and culture, are, still, incapable of being the instruments of modern knowledge.

The topsy-turvey position of English *vis-a-vis* mother-tongue and the unnatural superiority of English in all walks of life, has created resentment among the freedom-lovers. Gandhiji almost led the revolt and savants like Tagore, Aravindo and Nehru tried to set the wheel in order. Ma. Po. Si., in Tamil Nadu, is almost a lone warrior, engaged in the ennobling task of emancipating Tamil culture from the emasculating shackles of the English domination. He has started the crusade against the unnatural suzerainty of English at the expense of the mother-tongue and is consistently propagating the maxim: "*Tamil-at all stages and in all walks of life*". (எங்கும் எதிலும் தமிழ்)

He campaigns for the progressive "Tamilization" of the entire administration, courts, education and culture. He is not averse to English as a foreign language, as a

language of modern knowledge and culture; but, he is opposed to its perverse exaltation at the expense of the mother-tongue.

Ma. Po. Si. – The Silver-tongued Orator

Ma. Po. Si's many-splendoured genius has shone forth in various fields of literary, cultural and creative efforts. He is the Demosthenes of Tamil Nadu and his powerful tongue has helped in realising many noble causes. He has drunk deep at the perennial fountain of Tamil classics. And when he stands on the platform, holding the mike in his hand, viewing the surging crowd of listeners and dialating on some principle or expounding a cause, it would be a magical sight to see Ma. Po. Si., delivering his public speeches with a majestic and modulating voice, throwing out his flourishes, with faultless symmetry and rich cadence. Valluvar and Kambar, Barathiyar and Vallalar will come gracefully to his aid, in order to embellish a message and enlighten a view-point. The art of selecting choice quotations in an apposite manner, is one of the regaling traits of his public speaking. When he wants to assail or criticise, his precise, sharp, razor-like logic will pierce the opponent's view and bombard it to unrecognisable pieces. His advocacy of a cause, built upon sound logic and common scence, will carry instant and immediate conviction and listeners will undergo the process of conversion imperceptibly without recognising the mental transformation induced by Ma. Po. Si's marvellous artistry. As Valluvar says :

“விரைந்து தொழில் கேட்கும் ஞாலம் நிரந்தினிது
 சொல்லுதல் வல்லார்ப் பெறின்”—(திருக்குறள் : 648)
*“Behold the man, whose speech is well-ordered and
 couched in persuasive language;
 The world will be at their beck and call”*
 —(Tirukkural : 648)

Refurbishing the Past—A tool of Cultural Renaissance

There is a Tamil saying that a country is honoured and respected, not by the richness of its resources or extent of its territory, but by the magnanimous quality of its leaders. In order to impart a deep cultural root to the movement of Nationality consciousness, which he initiated, he has popularised the images of the long forgotten heroes and heroines of Tamil Nadu, like Kannagi, Katta Bomman and V. O. Chidambaram. He inspired a popular movement for cultural renaissance and organised a whirlwind campaign throughout the State. He wrote a factually-packed, emotionally inspiring biography of Kattabomman and V. O. Chidambaram. The world of celluloid art was attracted by the popularity of those heroes and produced two films, which brought international reputation.

Ma. Po. Si. – A Gifted Writer

Felicity of expression, simple yet fascinating style, impeccable logic, classical grace, depth of learning and maturity of thought characterise Ma. Po. Si.'s writings. His pen has ventured forth on luminous wings of Thought, into diverse fields of knowledge. From folklore to philosophy, from politics to literature, he has sampled variegated fields. More than 60 Books flowed from his dynamic pen.

He never mounts the ivory tower nor sits in a cloistered seclusion, when he writes. In fact, his writing is but another extension of his speaking. For, his speech itself is a well designed, well proportioned, and well-balanced performance. The architecture of his style is precise, powerful and polished.

He is a versatile journalist of the highest calibre "*Tamil Murasu*" ("தமிழ் முரசு"), which he edited from 1946 to 1952, was one of the finest flowers of Tamil culture. His dialectical skill and polemical profundity has found expression in "*Sengol*" ("செங்கோல்") (Tamil Weekly), which is the current organ of Tamil Arasu Kazhagam - Movement.

Silambu Chelvar – The Populariser of the Classics

Silappathikaram, the Epic of the Anklet, written by the Prince-Poet Ilangovadigal, about 1500 years ago, has fastinated and attracted Ma. Po. Si. The powerful advocacy of Kannagi, the Heroine of the Epic, in the court of the Pandyan King at Madurai, inspired in him a sense of revolutionary admiration, evocative of the analogous advocacy of the cause of Indian Freedom, by Mahatma Gandhi before the Bar of World Opinion. It will be a rare feast to hear him deliver a three-hour discourse on Silappathikaram, quoting passage after passage in endless succession, with the purest joy. In fact, in the world of literary exposition, he is a class by himself; he is a peerless master in the art of quoting the text of literature with rare felicity and superb mastery. No wonder, he is christened "*Silambu Chelvar*" and millions throng to listen to his lectures.

The Art of Allusion

Another unique characteristic feature of his literary oratory, is that, he can make a perfectly apt and topical reference to some current political affairs and serve to enlighten that fact, with an allusion to an anecdote, drawn from a classic 2000 years old. Like the great classicist Lowes Dickonson, Ma. Po. Si's art of embellishing the most modern phenomenon with an antique experience is one of the rarest feats of scholarship.

A Critique of Vallalar—An Essay in Historical Analysis

The acme of his literary endeavour and creative genius has found expression in his treatise “வள்ளலார் கண்ட ஒருமைப்பாடு” (*Vallalar's concept of Integration*) It is a profound and penetrating exposition of the life and times and philosophy of the Poet Ramalinga Adigalar, who was a saint and seer, who flourished in the later part of the 19th century. For the first time in the history of literary criticism in Tamil Nadu, Ma. Po. Si. has introduced the principle of historical materialism in evaluating the epochal period 1823 - 1894, when Saint Vallalar lived. Vallalar, though a great humanist and mystic, had started a big crusade against the crippling effects of organised religion. Vallalar, who was a contemporary of Karl Marx, had recognised the emasculating effects of the emerging capitalism and bitterly indicted the callous inhumanity, unleashed by the degenerative forces of modern Capitalism. Though Vallalar taught a philosophy of Social Welfare, guided by Divinity, he had portrayed with photographic fidelity, the grim battle of the masses under the exploitative dispensation.

Ma. Po. Si's political training, imbibed from Mahatma Gandhi, had endowed him with a vision and an insight, to penetrate into the fertile spiritual outpourings of Vallalar (6000 Songs) and find the pearls of wisdom in the sea of Divine ecstasy “திரு அருட்பா” (Tiru Arutpa). The critical exposition has been the product of a patient, painstaking and prayerfully cultivated labour of love and research. Verily, the world of literary criticism in Tamil Nadu was stunned and dazed with amazement at the literary acumen and fecundity of thought of Ma. Po. Si. No wonder, the Sakitya Academy, which is the highest forum of literary adjudication in India, has awarded the first prize for this book in the year 1967 and the President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had given the award to Ma. Po. Si.

Ma. Po. Si's Foreign Tour

Ma. Po. Si. is no stranger to foreign lands, particularly in places where Tamilians abound in numbers. In June 1956, he visited Burma, where he was given a rousing reception. He had gone to Ceylon, a number of times and he is a discerning observer and diligent student of Ceylonese affairs, particularly Ceylon-Indian problem. His advice was sought by the Ceylon Tamil Congress and its leaders. He had been to Malaysia and Singapore in 1964 - 65 on two occasions.

At the time of the First World Tamil Conference, he had attended as a delegate sponsored by the Government of Tamil Nadu. He had also participated actively in the Second World Tamil Conference held at Madras in January 1968 and the honour of opening the statue of Kannagi, the Heroine of Silappathikaram,

was given to him, in recognition of his having popularised the Epic.

Towards Co-operative Federalism

Tamil Arasu Kazhagam Movement had been consistently propagating and popularising the idea of attaining full autonomy of the States, consistent with a Federal Centre in India. It has conducted a number of meetings and conferences, all over Tamil Nadu, even on the eve of constitution-making (in 1946 - 49). In fact, it is the only organisation in the whole of India, which has been consistently advocating the principle of State-autonomy.

Tamil Arasu Kazhagam launched a token agitation on 20th August 1969, called "*State Autonomy Struggle*". The distinguishing feature of this struggle was that this was the first-ever constitutional agitation launched in the whole of India to amend the constitution for ensuring State Autonomy within a truly Federal Constitution.

Ma. Po. Si. Meets Mahatma Gandhi

Ma. Po. Si. has a rich Ghandhian tradition. The historic interview, which he had with Mahatma Gandhi, while he was staying at Madras in early 1946, in the immediate presence of Rajaji, was an unforgettable experience. Meeting the Mahatma face to face, he felt that he was in the living presence of a great servant of humanity and a man of God.

Ma. Po. Si. – a Byword in Tamil Homes

In his many-faceted career, as a public speaker, literateur, writer and legislator, Ma. Po. Si. has become a revered and respected leader of great distinction. Ma. Po. Si. has become a by-word in every Tamilian home. In fact, he is one of the finest flowers, which Tamil culture and Gandhian tradition have nurtured and reared.

Bon Voyage

The agile, alert and active leader of Tamil Arasu Kazhagam, represents the most progressive spirit and inspires a growing and vital, nationality-based and socialist-oriented Movement. At his 65th age, he is moving out of India to see the panorama of progress in the Soviet Union, the classic home of Socialism. In the second lap of foreign tour, he is attending the Third World Tamil Conference to be held at Paris from 15th to 17th July, 1970 as a delegate of the Tamil Nadu Government. He has also programmed to tour U.K. and other European countries. May his mission as an ambassador of Tamil Culture prove a great success! We wish him bon-voyage!

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